

REMARKS

The specification has been amended to add section headings.

Claims 1, 3-4, 6, 9-10, 12-13, 15, and 18 were rejected as unpatentable over SANSONE 5,978,781 in view of ECKERT 4,649,266. Claims 2 and 11 were rejected further in view of CORDERY et al. 5,982,896. Claims 5 and 14 were rejected further in view of GILHAM 6,308,165. Claims 7 and 16 were rejected further in view of PASTOR et al. 5,390,251. Claims 8 and 17 were rejected further in view of PEYRET 5,688,056. Independent claims 1 and 10 have been replaced with new claims 19 and 22 that avoid the rejections of record and reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejections are respectfully requested. Claims 2 and 11 have been replaced with new claims 20-21 and 23-24. Claims 3-9 and 12-18 have been amended into conformance with the new independent claims from which they depend.

SANSONE discloses a method for checking a postal indicia 14, 23 comprising a unique number. In one embodiment, the unique number is a security code 19 that is derived from address field 12 and information contained in the postage meter that affixed indicia 14 (column 3, lines 14-17). In another embodiment, the unique number is a barcode 30 that is derived from address field 12 and information contained in the postal security device that affixed indicia 23 (column 3, lines 54-56). Thus, in both embodiments, the unique numbers are generated by

postage meters and postal security devices that are local terminals, and the numbers are (at least partly) based on postal data.

In the present invention, however, use is made of a central office to store unique bit strings in a first memory and issue them to at least one of a plurality of terminals (see page 8, line 30 to page 9, line 12 of the specification). In the terminals, an identification code is combined with the unique bit strings, and the resulting combinations are sent back to the central office for storage in a second memory (see page 10, lines 17-23 of the specification). The stored set of unique bit strings does not necessarily depend on postal data, since it is stored centrally.

As implicitly mentioned in the Official Action, ECKERT does not disclose a unique number of any kind. Furthermore ECKERT does not disclose the concept of using a central office with a central database for issuing and controlling unique bit strings.

New claims 19 and 22 emphasize this difference between SANSONE/ECKERT and the present invention. Support for this amendment is found on page 8, line 33 to page 9, line 3 and page 10, lines 17-23. Since both SANSONE and ECKERT do not disclose central control of unique bit strings for use in delivery of mail, new claims 19 and 22 are believed to comprise an inventive step over SANSONE in view of ECKERT.

The dependent claims are allowable for the same reasons as the other references do not make up for the deficiency noted above.

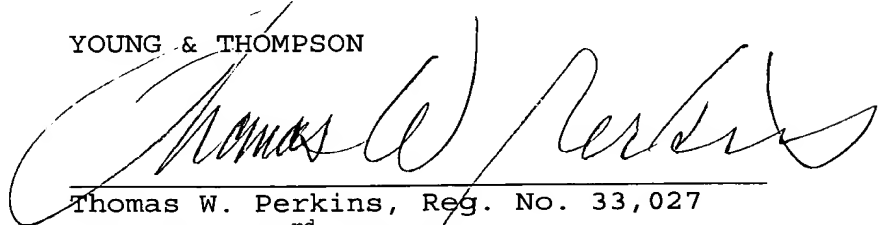
Further, as to claim 8, although PEYRET discloses the concept of post-payment, it does not disclose the start of a routine if it is established that the franking mark is valid. It only suggests providing a ceiling beyond which the system shuts down or by establishing a limit date of use.

In view of the present amendment and the foregoing remarks, it is believed that the present application has been placed in condition for allowance. Reconsideration and allowance are respectfully requested.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies, to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 25-0120 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. § 1.16 or under 37 C.F.R. § 1.17.

Respectfully submitted,

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TWP/lrs